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SUBJECT: BANGLADESH: WHAT WE NEED TO DO IN THE NEXT 180 DAYS

REF: Dhaka 1224, Dhaka 1361

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (SBU) Bangladesh's return to democracy following the successful December 29 Parliamentary elections presents significant opportunities for advancing U.S. Government (USG) interests in the country and the region. Embassy Dhaka has identified five major mission objectives for the USG to focus on over the next 180 days: 1) consolidating the democratic transition, 2) promoting stability and security, 3) making development assistance effective, 4) promoting strategic partnership, and 5) increasing U.S. Mission effectiveness. To achieve these objectives, the Embassy requests \$10 million in additional Democracy and Governance funds. Embassy Dhaka considers coordinated implementation of this strategy over the coming months by all USG agencies critical to its success.

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180 DAY TRANSITION PLANNING PROCESS  
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¶2. (SBU) With assistance from the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS), Embassy Dhaka recently began a comprehensive strategic planning effort outlining USG goals and priorities during the first six months, or 180 days, after the election of the new Government of Bangladesh (GOB). The strategic planning process, begun in early December 2008 and facilitated by S/CRS in both Washington and Dhaka, identified five strategic objectives as USG priorities for the first six months of a new government. The interagency transition planning team identified the necessary tasks to achieve each objective, developed metrics and indicators of success, and completed a risk assessment with mitigation strategies for each of four worst-case scenarios, which include: a return to corrupt political practices, significant post-election violence, the danger of ungoverned spaces, and the possibility of economic collapse. In addition to identifying key near-term priorities, the 180-Day Transition Plan has clarified key areas for further funding over the longer term. This exercise will be synchronized with the FY 2010 Mission Strategic Plan.

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DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION  
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¶3. (SBU) Bangladesh's December 2008 Parliamentary elections present a key opportunity to strengthen Bangladesh's incipient democracy. The first major objective of the 180-Day Transition Plan is to ensure the "Smooth transition to a fully functional democratic government committed to reforms and accepted by the opposition." This will be achieved by encouraging formation of a new GOB quickly while minimizing political retribution, encouraging the continuation of the Caretaker Government's reform agenda, and ensuring political stability during the transition. Given funding constraints, Embassy Dhaka has embarked upon this objective with almost no funding for

democracy and governance (D/G) activities. Additional resources are urgently needed to initiate a more robust DG program to include legislative strengthening activities for the newly elected parliament designed to help the opposition play a constructive role.

Ideally, we will also strengthen political parties and encourage them to embark upon an irreversible path towards internal reform. At the same time, Bangladesh requires better governance at the municipal and regional levels to strengthen democracy reform in country. We estimate a modest program to achieve these goals would require restoring the previously cut \$10 million annual D/G funding for each of the new Bangladeshi administration's five years in office.

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STABILITY AND SECURITY  
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¶4. (SBU) By supporting implementation of the Caretaker Government's roadmap, Bangladesh's military demonstrated its commitment to return to its traditional role and provide the newly-elected GOB the space it requires to exercise civil authority. Given the country's historical context the military remains wary of a complete disengagement from politics. The second objective of the 180-Day Transition Plan focuses on enhancing civilian control of the military, continuous professionalization of the security forces, and combating terrorism. Maintaining strong levels of funding for International Military Education and Training (IMET), Counter Terrorism Fellowship Program (CTFP), Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI), and other programs facilitating professional military education is crucial. At the same time, expansion of the Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program (ATA), International Criminal Investigative Assistance and Training Program (ICITAP), and other security-related programs is needed to facilitate true police

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reform, make meaningful improvements to the system of border management, and provide further training to the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB).

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DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE  
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¶5. (SBU) An elected government provides an opening to deepen engagement on a host of development related policy issues. There is also an opportunity to promote the reemergence of an independent media and strengthen civil society. The third objective of the 180-Day Transition Plan encourages the GOB to use an open consultative process to establish development priorities, recognize development linkages to energy, economic, and trade policy, and to create the space for free and independent media. Even more than with other objectives, achievement of this goal will require close coordination with other bilateral and multilateral development partners.

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PROMOTING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP  
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¶6. (SBU) The transition to a new government is an opportunity to remind Bangladesh of its importance as a key democratic partner of the U.S. The fourth objective of the 180-Day Transition Plan seeks to highlight the importance of our bilateral relationship, and encourage the GOB to play a constructive role in international bodies and adopt a new approach to regional cooperation. Despite its good intentions and strong track record, the Caretaker Government was never fully able to remove the stigma of its creation as a result of a military intervention. A freely elected government will be able to act bilaterally, regionally, and globally without this stigma.

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INCREASING U.S. MISSION EFFECTIVENESS  
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¶7. (SBU) During its two years in power, the Caretaker Government was unable to focus on resolving numerous Embassy management and

consular concerns. With a new GOB, there may be opportunities for quick resolution of long-standing issues that could greatly enhance the Mission's effectiveness in promoting a stable democracy in Bangladesh. The fifth objective of the 180-Day Transition Plan urges the GOB to adopt policies that facilitate legitimate travel and seeks GOB agreement on policies that will enhance the Mission support platform. We estimate that addressing Consular concerns with the GOB will require no additional expenditure of USG funds.

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COMMENT: MAXIMIZING USG GOALS DURING THE TRANSITION  
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18. (SBU) A more stable, effective Bangladesh will allow the USG to effectively promote democracy, development, and the denial of space to terrorists. The USG is well positioned to play a leadership role in each of these areas to encourage and assist the new GOB to make good on its promises to fight graft, enhance prosperity, and promote a new political atmosphere of cooperation. During the 180 day planning process, we were able to identify short-term opportunities the Mission could pursue with limited additional resources. In the FY 2010 MSP, we will highlight longer term ways in which Embassy Dhaka can advance these important goals as well as the additional resources that will be necessary to achieve our objectives.

19. (SBU) Embassy Dhaka greatly appreciates the outstanding support provided by TDY Planner Michael Michener and looks forward to continuing collaboration with S/CRS and other Washington-based elements of the Country Team.  
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